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Key points:

- Invest heavily in teacher training, supports
- Solidify efforts with a leadership team
- Strictly follow the selected model

Quality implementation makes or breaks family engagement

Implementation is a science, and no matter how successful or evidenced-based a family engagement strategy is, sometimes more harm than good comes from poor implementation. Often people assume the model doesn't work, said [Maria Paredes](#), a [WestEd](#) senior program associate for family engagement in education.

A related challenge is the lack of family engagement training and support for teachers, she said.

Invest time and resources in turning family engagement initiatives into stand-out successes, and seek models that apply research in a practical fashion, she urged.

For example, she finds it requires as much as 10 days for adequate training, coaching, and other supports to begin implementation of the Academic Parent-Teacher Team model.

APTT replaces traditional parent-teacher conferences with a data-driven, team-based approach.

Parents learn about crucial grade-level skills, their child's performance, and how to support at-home learning. APTT applies research about how at-home learning and parents expressing and modeling high expectations impact children. It provides an open, intentional, and strategic way to build parents' capacity and link family engagement directly to academics, she explained.

Paredes developed the APTT model as director of community education for the [Creighton \(Az.\) School District](#). Now, the model is gaining national momentum.

Here are some of her pointers on APTT implementation, which also apply to other family engagement initiatives.

- **Examine assumptions.** Sometimes to be "culturally competent," educators shy away from certain conversations. However, some Title I parents struggled as students, don't have a high school diploma, come from a culture where questioning teachers is frowned upon, and may feel inadequate academically. "If I am a middle class parent, I have a good idea of what to ask," Paredes said. However, Title I parents may not. "In reality, the culturally sensitive part comes in saying parents need a lot of information, and they need me to guide them in their role."
- **Avoid shortcuts.** Show teachers the research and how to apply it. Outline the initiative's steps, and give teachers time and resources to follow them. Although data indicate APTT decidedly impacts student achievement, the model won't create similar results if adopted through a hurried implementation, she said.

- **Create a team.** APTT is in its third year, and Paredes continues to improve the model using implementation results. For example, she added a family engagement leadership team component that includes parents, staff, and community partners. The FELT creates yearlong family engagement goals aligned to school improvement and supports APTT implementation. The FELT keeps the system going if leadership changes.
- **Implement strategically.** Some schools or districts implement first in the early grades and add a year each school year. It's critical that APTT meetings start a month or less into the school year, so parents and teachers are proactive. "Data needs to be hopeful," Paredes said.
- **Stick to it.** Consistency is key. For example, it's unwise to adopt APTT if schools and teachers aren't committed to the three team meetings and individual parent-teacher conference.
- **Evaluate efforts.** Gather model implementation data to study parent attendance, the goals set and how many are met, and ask for teacher and parent feedback. Have a principal-led focus group annually with families, teachers, and students to gather feedback and celebrate successes.
- **Master the model.** "Don't change anything until you are better than the model," Paredes said. "Mastery allows for creativity."

Related Story:

Stellar training turns theory into practice

Here is an overview of the teacher training needed to fully implement Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.

A two-hour orientation explains family engagement research and how APTT applies that research. Teachers learn about parent self-efficacy and why it's critical to address in Title I schools.

During an all-day APTT readiness workshop, teachers:

- Work in grade-level teams to define three to five foundational grade-level skills. These skills become the focus for APTT meetings and the data collected.
- Write a personal invitation for parents.
- Study how to collect and share data with families.
- Create goal sheets that parents use to set 60-day goals during each of the three APTT meetings.
- Select at-home activities that match the foundational grade-level skills.
- Watch videos of other teachers conducting APTT meetings.
- Plan ways to create a comfortable environment that encourages parents to network.

Teachers need additional training and coaching for the second and third APTT meetings and individual parent-teacher conference. Ideally, a coach or staff developer observes some APTT meetings and helps as needed. Finally, give teachers time to debrief and learn from one another after each meeting.

Source: Maria Paredes, [WestEd](#) senior program associate for family engagement in education.

--Tricia Offutt covers family and community engagement and other Title I issues for LRP Publications.

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